



New Zealand Centre
for Gifted Education
Empowering Extraordinary Minds

Finding hidden gifted kids.



At NZCGE we describe a gifted child as one who has innate high abilities in relation to their same-age peers, in one or more domains (intellectual, creative, social, cultural, physical, technological).

Sometimes these abilities and qualities show up in outstanding achievement. More often it is the child's potential that is noticed through conversation, observation, behavioural characteristics and out-of-school work.

Whilst some gifted children display their gifts very obviously, some do not. For a range of reasons, they stay 'hidden'. This means it is difficult for all of those involved in supporting the child to develop ways and means to meet their unique needs.

Who is 'hiding'?

Applications to our MindPlus programmes across New Zealand show clearly that there are some groups of gifted students who are 'hiding'.

The largest and most obvious groups of 'hidden' gifted are girls, and Māori and Pasifika children.

Gifted students who are strongly introverted, twice-exceptional, anxious, performance-shy, or yet to develop significant or obvious strengths and talents are also 'hiding'.

Gifted students who are under-achieving or only selectively achieving may have figured out the minimum effort required to get by at school. Whilst those in this group are capable of high achievement, the learning and structure required may not fit with their preferences.

Why is this problematic?

Some groups of children are able to have their particular needs met and some never get access to the specialist support they need to fulfill their potential. Dominant groups are over-represented in gifted education programmes and non-dominant groups are under-represented. This means it is challenging for schools to fulfil the obligations of the National Administration Goals and the Learning Support Action Plan.

Why might they be 'hiding'?

- Gifted girls are more likely to conform to social norms, and learn and behave in more conventional rather than exceptional ways.
- Gifted Māori and Pasifika students may cloak their giftedness with humility or demonstrate it in culturally relevant ways that remain unseen in some environments.
- Twice-exceptional students (those who are gifted and have another neurodiversity that impacts upon their learning) may be under-achieving or masking their giftedness due to their learning difficulties.
- Some gifted students may feel that their particular gifts are not valued in their current setting, so choose not to demonstrate them.
- Other gifted students may feel uncertain about their abilities and qualities, feel strong internal or external pressure to perform or achieve or to be a certain way, and therefore 'mask' their giftedness.

What might 'hiding' look like?

In learning, you may notice uneven performance across subjects or time, rapid or stagnating development over time, 'flashes of brilliance' contrasting against average or below performance, or a struggle with basic or routine tasks but ability to grasp advanced concepts or ideas.

In behaviour, you may notice non-conformity, non-compliance, complacency, strong preferences for or against particular topics or subjects, meltdowns, and demonstrations of anxiety.

Three top tips



Provide an invitational learning environment: give specific opportunities for varied, flexible and enticingly challenging learning, not as 'extras for experts' or early finishers, but as valid and worthwhile options.



Watch closely for: an uneven achievement profile; achievement beyond reading, writing and maths; a spark in creative thinking, questioning, idea generation, or imagination; a strong sense of fairness, justice or ethics; culturally relevant competencies including high respect for elders and the differently abled.



Listen: listen to other teachers who work with the child. An example might be an art specialist teacher who notices unusual creativity or a science specialist who notices advanced or complex understandings – the insights of all of those who meet the child are worth capturing. Listen also to parents – they usually have a good sense of their child's differences and have good insights into their child's inner world. Listen also to children - remember that all behaviour is communication. Work out what this child trying to tell you through their actions.

To learn more about gifted kids and the MindPlus programmes we offer for students and for schools, check out our website at nzcge.nz or get in touch at hello@nzcge.co.nz or 0800 769 243.

